

Under the RADAR: The neglected threats of cocaine, benzos and gabapentinoids

Drugs Team, Public Health Scotland

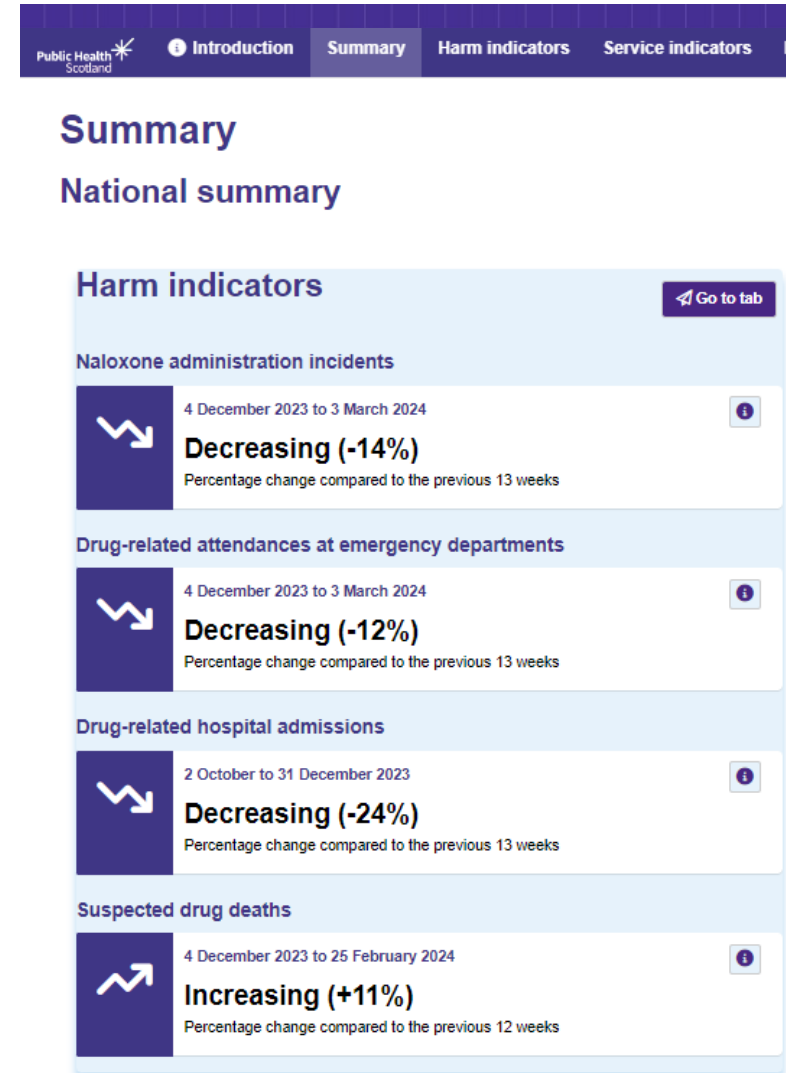
Vicki Craik, Public Health Intelligence Advisor

Public Health 
Scotland

Scotland's early warning system

RADAR is a drugs early warning system that provides a coordinated way to collect, assess and share information. It aims to:

- Identify new and emerging risks, harms and trends (supply changes, new drugs)
- Publish accessible and up to date information (resources, alerts, reports, dashboard)
- Inform timely and targeted action
- Prevent and reduce drug harms and deaths





Leverhulme Research Centre
for Forensic Science
University of Dundee



Reach 
Rights • Empowerment • Aspiration • Choice • Hope



**Change
Grow
Live**



**we are
withyou**



Fife Alcohol and Drug Partnership
Promoting Recovery. Reducing Harm.





A WAY TO REPORT DRUG HARMS

- Send reports on trends, new drugs and harms.
- Relevant reports will be sent to local key contacts.
- Reports can be anonymous.

QUARTERLY REPORT AND DASHBOARD

- See the latest data and filter by NHS board.

NETWORK

- Sign up to receive communications and reports.

RESOURCES AND ALERTS

- Alerts on nitazenes, xylazine and bromazolam.
- Resources:
 - A-Z of drug names
 - Local guide
 - Emergency overdose booklet

How does it work?

RADAR collects and shares essential information on drug trends and harms by using a consistent process to monitor, assess and respond.



Type of data

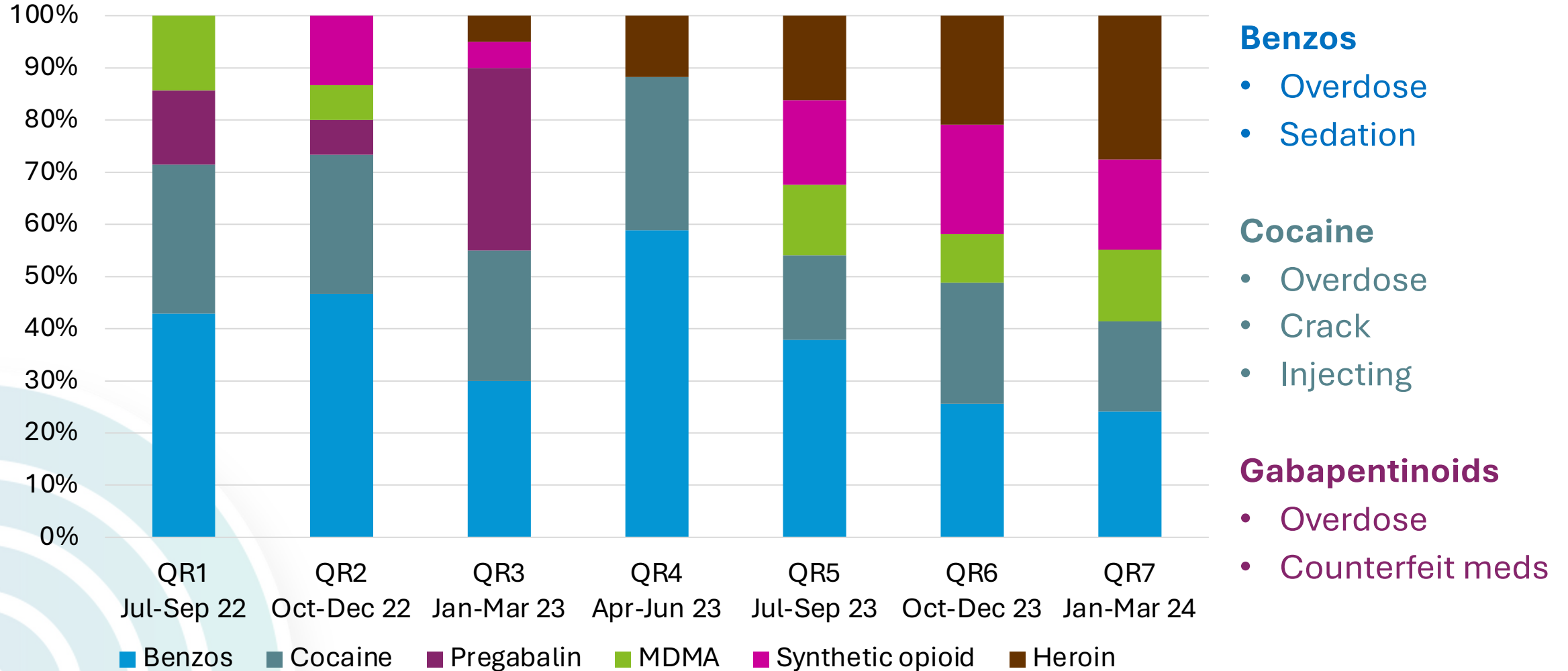
time delay | high certainty



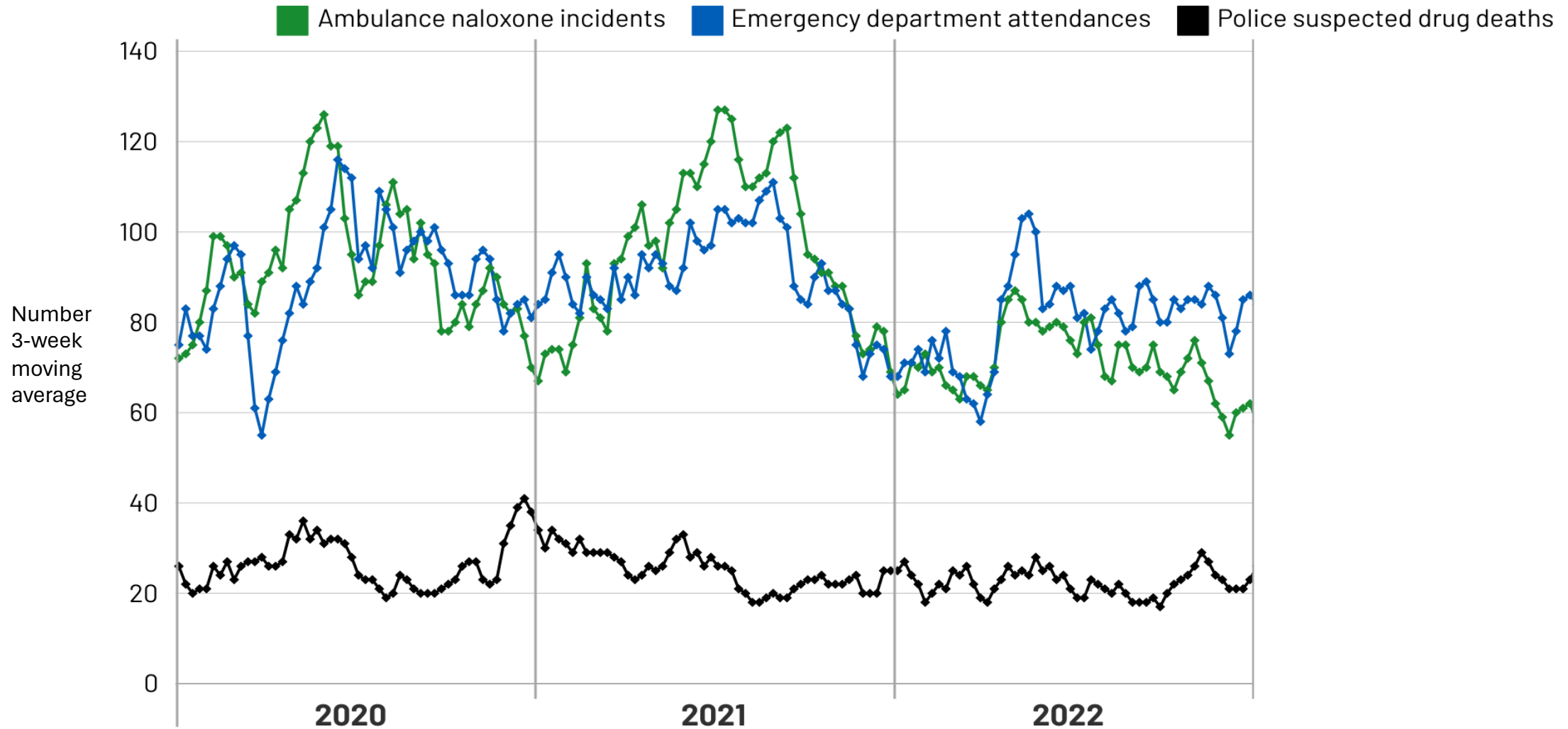
real time | lower certainty



Concerns & reports to RADAR: most common drug types



Drug harm indicators



Drug-related deaths
(% change on prev year)

1,339 (+5%)

1,330 (-1%)

1,051 (-21%)

Source: scotland.shinyapps.io/phs-drugs-radar-dashboard. Data: Scottish Ambulance Service, PHS, Police Scotland, National Records of Scotland

New drugs in Scotland: 2021 to 2024

POST-MORTEM TOXICOLOGY

PRISON DRUG ANALYSIS PROJECT

ASSIST: QUEEN ELIZABETH
UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL
EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

POLICE SEIZURES

WEDINOS (WELSH DRUG
TESTING SERVICE)



Opioids

- metonitazene
- protonitazene
- isotonitazene
- N-pyrrolidino-etonitazene

Depressants

- xylazine
- bromazolam
- gidazepam
- lormetazepam

Cannabinoids

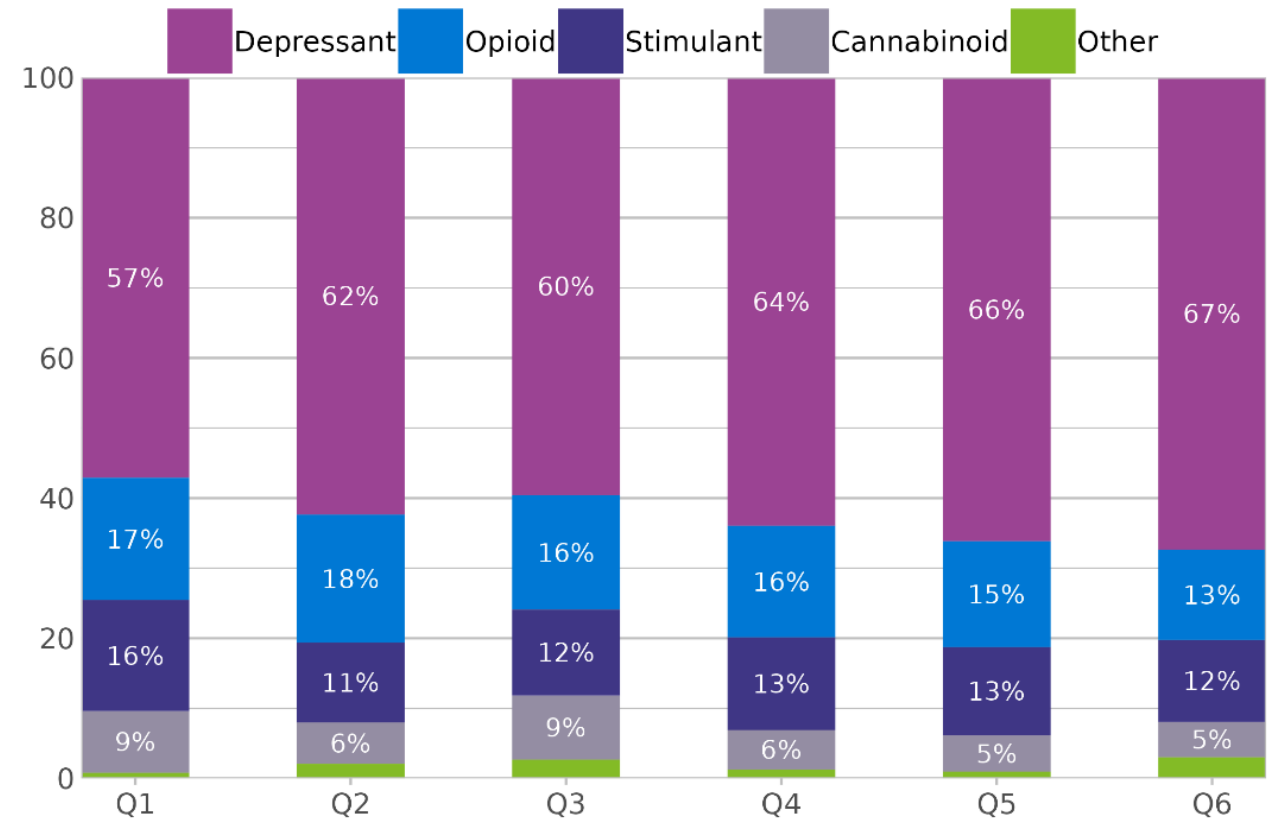
- ADB-5'Br-BUTINACA
- CH-PIATA
- 5F-BZO-POXIZID
- BZO-4en-POXIZID
- MDMB-INACA

Stimulants

- dimethylpentylone

Toxicology

- Most harm is linked to polydrug use (average 5 in deaths, 6 in ASSIST).
- Most common drugs:
 - cocaine
 - benzos (23 types)
 - gabapentinoids
 - heroin
- Increasing harms from new potent substances in the supply.

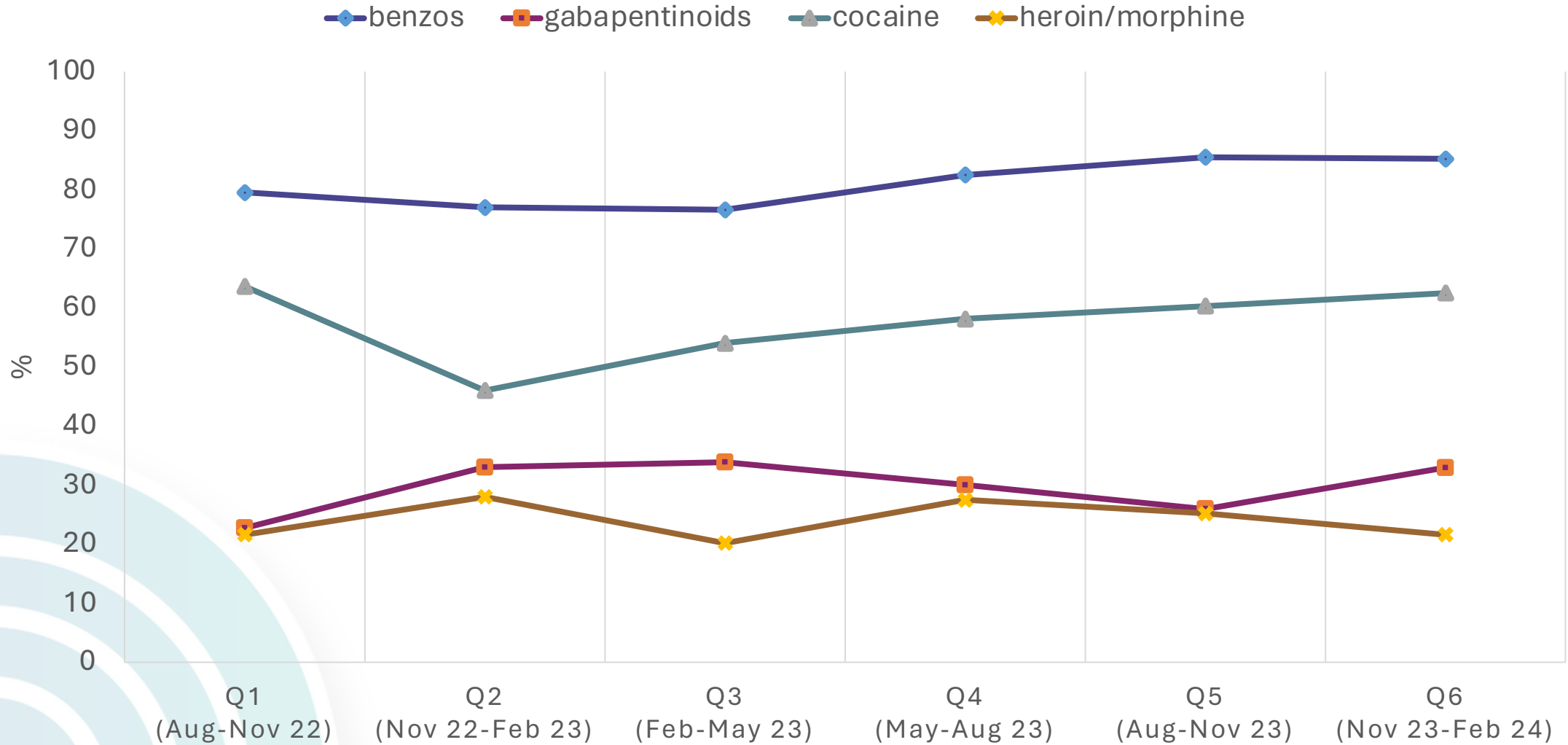


Source: ASSIST

In the last quarter, there was 496 detections of 40 different illicit drugs, in samples from 88 patients

ASSIST: emergency department study at Queen Elizabeth University Hospital, NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde

ASSIST toxicology



1. STREET BENZOS



Pre 2016 (1st generation)

- diazepam
- temazepam

2016 - 2021 (2nd)

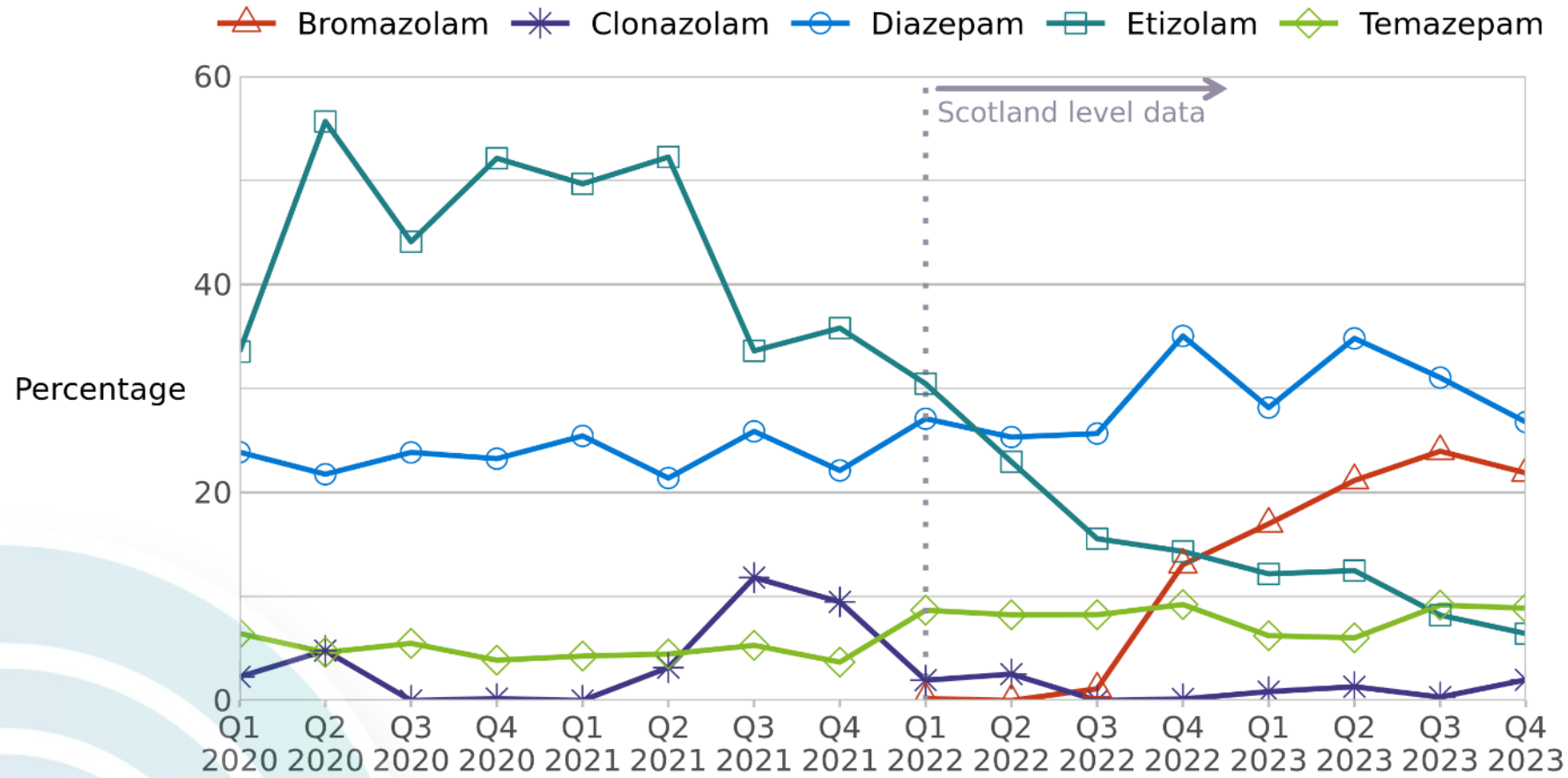
- etizolam (street benzos)
- alprazolam (Xanax)

2021 - 2024 (3rd)

- bromazolam



Post-mortem toxicology for benzos

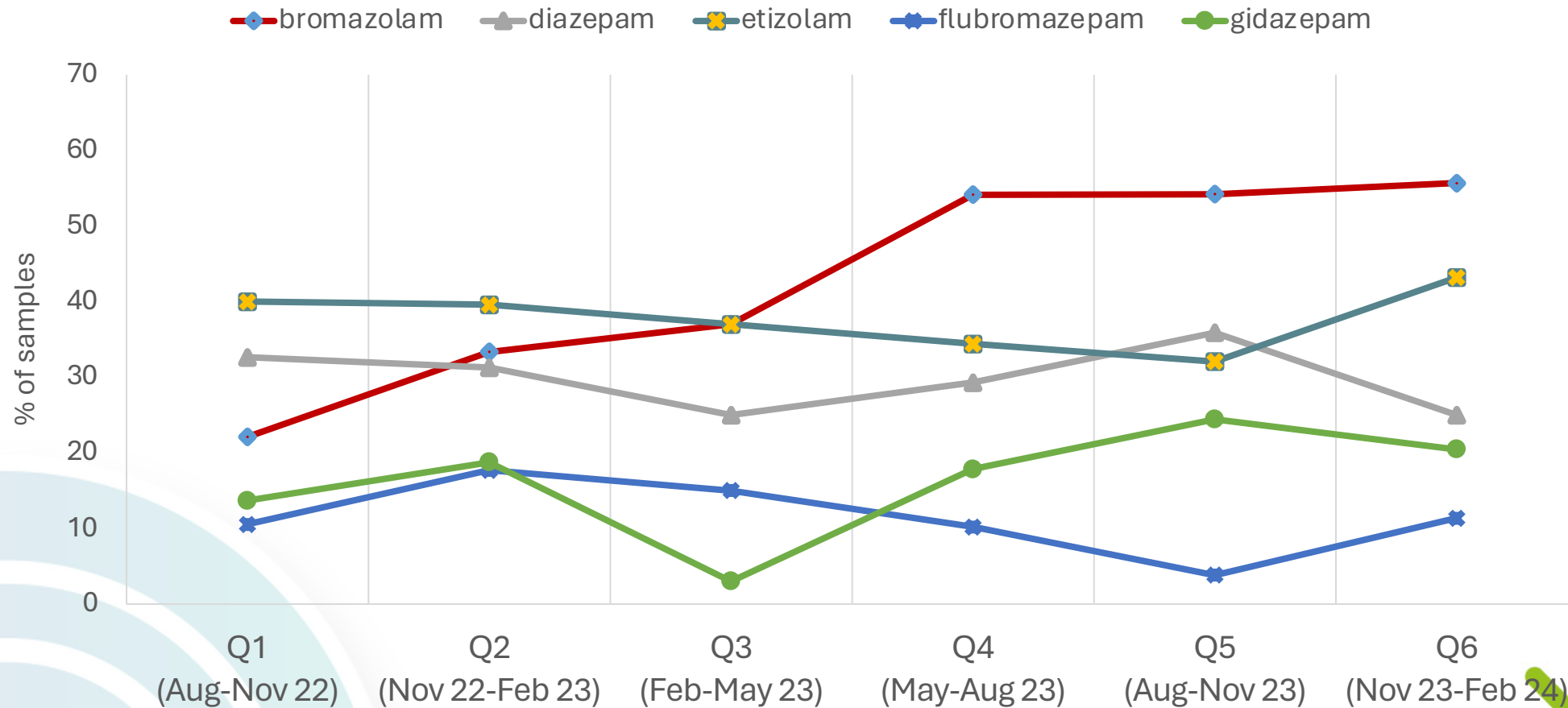


Source: Scottish Police Authority Forensic Services and other UK laboratories
Forensic Medicine and Science (University of Glasgow)
Department of Clinical Biochemistry at NHS Grampian

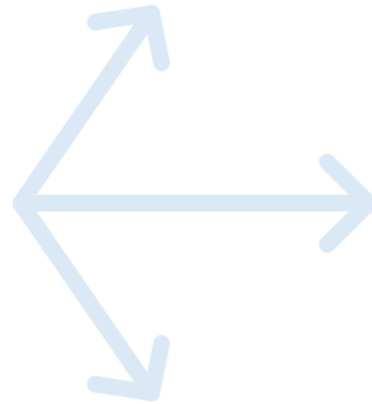


Source: RADAR QR7

ASSIST testing for benzos



What's next?



- **Prescribable benzos**

- diazepam
- temazepam
- nitrazepam
- clonazepam

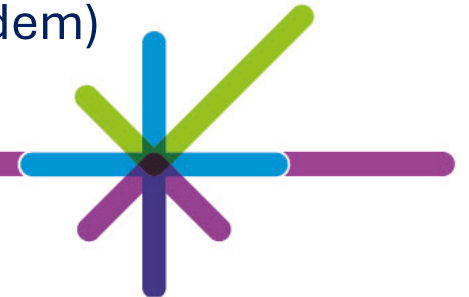
- **Novel benzos**

- flubromazepam
- flubromazolam
- clonazolam
- gidazepam (half-life of 86 hours)

- **Unknown benzos**

- **Other drugs**

- gabapentinoids
- Z-drugs (e.g. zolpidem)
- xylazine



2. COCAINE



Most common drug in:

- post-mortem toxicology
- Glasgow ASSIST hospital toxicology

Increasing reports of:

- Crack cocaine
- Cocaine injecting (powder and crack)
- Adverse effects

Reports of snorting, swallowing, injecting



2. COCAINE



Harm reports

- Overdose
- Deaths
- Mental health effects
- Nose and palette damage
- Methemoglobinemia
- Wounds

Trend reports

- Cocaine and ketamine
- Crack
- Liquid cocaine

2021: few reports of crack

2022: people making their own

2023: wide availability from dealers



3. GABAPENTINOIDS



Gabapentinoids are a group of depressants, including **gabapentin** and **pregabalin**.

In the ASSIST project, gabapentinoids:

- were detected in 30% of samples
- made up 6% of all detections

There was a total of 225 detections:

- 66% (148): pregabalin
- 33% (77): gabapentin

Detected by WEDINOS in 18 samples from Scotland, May 23 to Apr 24:

- 83% (15): pregabalin
- 17% (3): gabapentin



- Can be prescribed to treat epilepsy and neuropathic pain.
- Reduce tolerance to opioids.

3. GABAPENTINOIDS



Harm reports

- Overdose
- Deaths
- Seizures

Trend reports

- Mostly pregabalin
- Counterfeit
- Online pharmacies



- Most commonly found as a red and white capsule stamped 'signature' or '300'.

What's on the RADAR?

Urgent and increasing need for enhanced treatment for non-opioids.

Increased risk and harm from polydrug use and drug supply changes:

- **More** cocaine in all forms - crack, powder, injecting
- **Switch** in benzos due to control of bromazolam
- **Less** heroin, **more** new synthetic opioids
- **More** availability – fake online pharmacies, social media





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www.publichealthscotland.scot/

[RADAR](#)

You can help reduce drugs harm in Scotland

Join the **RADAR** Network

RADAR (Rapid Action Drug Alerts and Response) is Scotland's innovative new drugs early warning system.

By joining the RADAR network you will:

- receive up-to-date information on current drugs trends
- easily share reports of drugs harms in your area
- connect with other key health and social care organisations

Get involved. Sign up here:

publichealthscotland.scot/RADAR

